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Report of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on the work of its thirtieth session

(New York, 7 and 18 August 2017)

Summary

The thirtieth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names was held at United Nations headquarters, in New York, on 7 and 18 August 2017, in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2016/259.

The present report describes the activities undertaken at the session and presents the major findings of the Group of Experts, focusing primarily on the importance of its work in supporting the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names and the essential assistance it continues to afford Member States in the standardization of geographical names and related areas of cartography and geographical information management.

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I. Matters calling for action by the Economic and Social Council or brought to its attention

Draft decision for adoption by the Council

1. The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names recommends to the Economic and Social Council the adoption of the following draft decision:

Report of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on its thirtieth session, and dates for the next meeting of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on the standardization of geographical names

The Economic and Social Council:

(a) Takes note of the report of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on its thirtieth session;

(b) Decides that the next meeting of the Group of Experts on the standardization of geographical names shall be held over a five-day period, from 29 April to 3 May 2019, at United Nations Headquarters, in New York, reflecting the draft resolution contained in document E/CONF.105/L.3. However, existing arrangements for the thirty-first session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and the Twelfth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names will continue to be in effect until the Council has adopted the draft resolution.

II. Reports of the working groups

2. The Group of Experts considered agenda item 3 (reports of the working groups) at its 1st and 2nd meetings, on 7 August 2017 (see para. 44 below).

A. Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers

3. In working paper No. 1, the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers reported on its activities for 2016 and 2017, which included supporting the preparation of documents submitted at the seventh session of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, contributing articles to the bulletins of the Group of Experts on national efforts with respect to databases and gazetteers and providing consultancy and technical advice on the content and structure of data files and gazetteers. General progress against the work plan and future activities of the Working Group were noted.

4. An expert from the United States of America/Canada Division made a comment.

B. Working Group on Romanization Systems

5. The recent activities of the Working Group on Romanization Systems were highlighted in working paper No. 2. A resolution on a standardized system for the transliteration of geographical names from the Arabic alphabet to the Latin alphabet was adopted at the Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. It was announced that Catherine Cheetham (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) had accepted to become co-convener of the Working Group.

6. The Chair and experts from the Arabic Division and the Asia South-East Division made comments and raised questions. The coordinator of the Task Team for Africa made a statement.

C. Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy

7. In working paper No. 3, the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy catalogued the six international and one national toponymic training courses held since 2012. A training course was planned to be held in the Philippines in 2018. Three online courses were in various stages of development. A toponymy training manual would be made available for download from the website of the Group of Experts during the week of 14 August 2017. It was announced that Peder Gammeltoft (Denmark) had been selected to be the new convener of the Working Group.

D. Working Group on Exonyms

8. The results of the 19th meeting of the Working Group on Exonyms, a workshop held in Prague, were described in working paper No. 4. During that workshop, the debate on the use of exonyms versus endonyms continued. However, on the last day of the meeting, agreement was reached on a small set of globally common characteristics and criteria, which were to be submitted at the Eleventh Conference. Proceedings of the 19th meeting would appear as volume 7 in the book series *Name & Place — Contributions to Toponymic Literature and Research*. It was announced that Kohei Watanabe (Japan) would be the new convener of the Working Group.

E. Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation

9. The activities of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation since the twenty-ninth session of the Group of Experts, in Bangkok, were described in working paper No. 5. In additional to holding a workshop at that session on the implementation of resolutions, the Working Group had also held a meeting in Innsbruck, Austria, in April 2017. Discussions at both the workshop and the meeting had centred on the adoption of measures to improve the implementation of resolutions and the functioning of the Group of Experts and the Conference. Updates were provided on the work done on the resolutions database and the session evaluation survey.

F. Working Group on Publicity and Funding

10. The activities of the Working Group on Publicity and Funding since the twenty-ninth session of the Group of Experts, including the work done to achieve its aim of raising awareness about the need for standardization of geographical names, were presented in working paper No. 8. The presence of the Group of Experts on the Internet and social media was generally good, although there remained room to expand and improve. The report also highlighted challenges in finding financial support for training and sponsoring the attendance of representatives from developing countries at conferences and sessions. The convener of the Working Group indicated that a new convener or co-convener was sought.

11. An expert from the United Kingdom Division made a comment and raised a question.

G. Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors for international use

12. In working paper No. 9, it was noted that, at the twenty-ninth session of the Group of Experts, Finland, the Republic of Korea and South Africa had presented updated versions of toponymic guidelines. All toponymic guidelines were available on the website of the Group of Experts. To promote their dissemination, Wikipedia entries had been created and linked to relevant topics.

H. Task Team for Africa

13. In working paper No.13, the Task Team for Africa provided background information on its work. It discussed the challenges to the establishment of national bodies for the standardization of geographical names and described how it had been successful in achieving its goals. A meeting was being planned for November 2017 in Algiers.

I. Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage

14. The activities of the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage since 2016 were summarized in working paper No. 14. The Working Group had focused on the geographical names used by minorities, legislation and policies regarding geographical names as cultural heritage, the promotion of fieldwork and the registration of names. The Working Group intended to make guidelines available on its website, as well as present examples of good naming practices. Significantly, the Working Group noted that the Statute of the Group of Experts had been changed to include a reference to geographical names as cultural heritage. The Working Group planned to organize workshops and joint meetings with other working groups in order to strengthen its work.

J. Working Group on Toponymic Terminology

15. No paper was presented by the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology. It was announced that Trent Palmer (United States of America) had accepted to become the new convener of the Working Group.

K. Working Group on Pronunciation

16. No paper was presented by the Working Group on Pronunciation. An expert from the Dutch- and German-speaking Division announced on behalf of the convener that the convener would not able to continue to coordinate the activities of the Working Group.

17. The Group of Experts decided to abolish the Working Group on Pronunciation and to divide the activities of that Working Group between the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers and the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage.

III. Reports of the liaison officers

18. The Group of Experts considered agenda item 4 (reports of the liaison officers) at its 2nd meeting (see para. 45 below).

A. International Council of Onomastic Sciences

19. The liaison officer for the International Council of Onomastic Sciences outlined in working paper No. 6 the activities of Council, which included its newsletter and its official yearbook publication, *Onoma*. The Council had published a short list of key onomastic terms, which were available on its website in English, French and German. In addition, the Council had been cooperating with members of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology. The Council's twenty-sixth international congress would be held in Debrecen, Hungary, from 27 August to 1 September 2017.

B. Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers

20. The liaison officer for the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers presented working paper No. 7, relating its work on the assignment of top-level domains to geographical names, languages and scripts. The related fast-track process enabled countries and territories that used languages with non-Latin-based scripts to offer domain names to users in non-Latin characters. As at 1 July 2017, a total of 59 labels from 39 countries and territories had been successfully evaluated for delegation through the fast-track process. The next international public meeting of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN 60) would be held in Abu Dhabi in the third quarter of 2017.

C. Joint International Cartographic Association/International Geographical Union Commission on Toponymy

21. Information on recent activities of the Joint International Cartographic Association/International Geographical Union Commission on Toponymy was presented in working paper No. 10. Since the twenty-ninth session, the Joint Commission had organized two symposiums and co-organized two conferences. The Commission's flagship project was the establishment of a geographical names consortium of several universities, at which toponymic courses would be offered, based on a common curriculum approved by the Commission and with lecturers (among other individuals) from the Commission.

D. Working Group on Geographical Names of the Interstate Council for Geodesy, Cartography, Cadastre and Earth Remote Sensing of the Commonwealth of Independent States

22. Information on the recent activities of the Working Group on Geographical Names of the Interstate Council for Geodesy, Cartography, Cadastre and Earth Remote Sensing of the Commonwealth of Independent States was provided in working paper No. 11. At meetings in Yerevan and in Chisinau, in 2015 and 2016, respectively, the experts in attendance had exchanged information and shared experience on a range of issues related to geographical names. The working paper highlighted the Working Group's e-bulletin, which contained information on more than 6,300 geographical names in 11 countries that had been legally changed since 1990.

E. Pan American Institute of Geography and History

23. In working paper No. 12, presented on behalf of the liaison officer for the Pan American Institute of Geography and History, the various versions of the Institute's toponymic training course were discussed. No course was currently scheduled for presentation in 2017. The original two-week course had been designed to provide an introduction to and basis for national standardization of geographic names and a programme of applied toponymy. The course has been altered considerably and shortened to one week. The Institute's working group on geographical names was making progress towards offering an online course, but the completion date was yet unknown.

IV. Review of the statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

24. At its 2nd meeting, the Group of Experts considered agenda item 6 (review of the statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names) and the Chair of the Group presented a related document (GEGN/30/2). No comments were made from the floor.

V. Election of officers

25. The Group of Experts considered agenda item 7 (election of officers) at its 3rd meeting, on 18 August 2017.

26. The Group of Experts unanimously agreed to elect the following members to its Bureau for the period 2017-2022, subject to the adoption by the Economic and Social Council of the draft resolution on the future organization and methods of work of the Group, in which case the Bureau would be elected for the period 2017-2019 (see E/CONF.105/L.3):

Chair:
William **Watt** (Australia)

Vice-Chairs:
Naima **Friha** (Tunisia)
Hasanuddin **Abidin** (Indonesia)

Rapporteurs:
Trent **Palmer** (United States of America)
Sungjae **Choo** (Republic of Korea)

27. The newly elected Chair of the Group of Experts expressed his gratitude for the trust placed in him to guide the activities of the Group and pledged to do his best to advance its work.

VI. Planning for the implementation of the recommendations of the Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

28. The Group of Experts considered agenda items 8 (planning for the implementation of the recommendations of the Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names) and 9 (working groups for future requirements) at its 3rd meeting. It adopted a draft decision on the report of the

United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on its thirtieth session and dates for the next meetings of the Group of Experts on the standardization of geographical names (see para. 1 above).

29. The thirtieth session of the Group of Experts, held one day before and one day after the Eleventh Conference, achieved the following goals:

(a) The presentation of reports by the nine working groups, the coordinator for toponymic guidelines for map and other editors for international use and the Task Team for Africa on their work to follow up on the resolutions of the Tenth Conference;

(b) The discussion of organizational matters for the next session, including questions related to the technical committees that would be required, and new proposals for the consideration of country and division reports;

(c) The presentation of reports by the Group of Experts liaison officers for international organizations and the confirmation or reappointment of officers for the next period;

(d) The election of the Chair of the Group of Experts and other Bureau members to direct the work of the Group until the next session, pending the adoption by the Economic and Social Council of the draft resolution on the future organization and methods of work of the Group (see E/CONF.105/L.3);

(e) The planning of the activities of the working groups and other processes to implement the resolutions of the Eleventh Conference;

(f) The presentation of reports by geographical and linguistic divisions and working groups of the Group of Experts that met during the Eleventh Conference, in New York;

(g) The recommendation that the next meeting of the Group of Experts be held from 29 April to 3 May 2019 at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

30. The conclusions and recommendations specific to the content of the standardization of geographical names have been included in the resolutions and the report of the Tenth Conference (E/CONF.101/144).

31. The Group of Experts decided to establish a new task team for oral languages. It was noted that the working groups on romanization, on toponymic data files and gazetteers and on geographical names as cultural heritage would be seeking to work together on this project.

32. Special note was made of the world geographical names database of the Group of Experts[1] and experts were encouraged to contribute to the collection of information for the database.

VII. Provisional agenda for the thirty-first session

33. The Group of Experts considered agenda item 10 (provisional agenda for the thirty-first session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names) at its 3rd meeting. The provisional agenda for the thirty-first session (GEGN/30/6) and the alternative provisional agenda for the thirty-first session (GEGN/30/7) were not discussed, pending the decision of the Economic and Social Council on the draft resolution contained in document E/CONF.105/L.3, as recommended to the Council by the Group of Experts at the Eleventh Conference.

[1] Available from https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/geonames/.

VIII. Adoption of the report

34. At its 3rd meeting, the Group of Experts considered agenda item 11 (other business), adopted the draft report on the activities of its thirtieth session (GEGN/30/L.1) for submission to the Economic and Social Council and authorized its rapporteurs to finalize the report, in consultation with the Bureau and the secretariat of the Group of Experts.

35. Votes of thanks were expressed.

IX. Organization of the session

A. Opening and duration of the session

36. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council decision 2016/259, the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names held its thirtieth session at United Nations Headquarters on 7 and 18 August 2017. The Group of Experts held three meetings.

B. Attendance

37. The session was attended by 278 participants representing the geographical and linguistic divisions of the Group of Experts (see annex). The provisional list of participants is contained in document GEGN/30/3.

C. Officers of the session

38. The officers of the session were as follows:

Chair:
William **Watt** (Australia)

Vice-Chairs:
Ferjan **Ormeling** (Netherlands)
Naima **Friha** (Tunisia)

Rapporteurs:
Peder **Gammeltoft** (Denmark)
Trent **Palmer** (United States)

For the names of the Chairs of the divisions, see http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/divisions.html. The officers of the working groups were as follows:

Task Team for Africa

Coordinator:
Brahim **Atoui**

Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy

Convener:
Ferjan **Ormeling**

Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers

Convener:
Pier-Giorgio **Zaccheddu**

Working Group on Toponymic Terminology

Convener:
Staffan **Nyström**

Working Group on Romanization Systems

Convener:
Peeter **Päll**

Working Group on Country Names

Conveners:
Élisabeth **Calvarin**
Leo **Dillon**

Working Group on Publicity and Funding

Convener:
Peder **Gammeltoft**

Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation

Convener:
Sungjae **Choo**

Working Group on Exonyms

Convener:
Peter **Jordan**

Working Group on Pronunciation

Convener:
Tjeerd **Tichelaar**

Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage

Convener:
Annette **Torensjö**

Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors for international use

Coordinator:
Gerhard **Rampl**

Secretariat of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

Stefan **Schweinfest**, Director, Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Cecille **Blake**, Statistics Division
Vilma **Frani**, Statistics Division

D. Opening statements

39. The Chair opened the session on 7 August 2017.

40. In his opening remarks, the Chair summarized the main tasks ahead, including preparations for the Eleventh Conference.

41. The Director of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs made an opening statement summarizing recent accomplishments and highlighting the work of the Group of Experts.

E. Adoption of the agenda

42. At its 1st meeting, the Group of Experts adopted the provisional agenda (GEGN/30/1), as follows:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Reports of the working groups.
4. Reports of the liaison officers.
5. Organizational matters concerning the Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.
6. Review of the statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.
7. Election of officers.
8. Planning for the implementation of the recommendations of the Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.
9. Working groups for future requirements.
10. Provisional agenda for the thirty-first session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.
11. Other business.

43. At the same meeting, the Group of Experts approved its organization of work (GEGN/30/5/Rev.1).

44. At its 1st and 2nd meetings, the Group of Experts considered, under agenda item 3, reports by the conveners of the working groups on toponymic data files and gazetteers, romanization systems, training courses in toponymy, exonyms, evaluation and implementation, publicity and funding, and geographical names as cultural heritage, as well as reports by the coordinator for toponymic guidelines for map and other editors for international use and the coordinator of the Task Team for Africa.

45. At its 2nd meeting, the Group of Experts considered, under agenda item 4, reports by the International Council of Onomastic Sciences; the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers; the Joint International Cartographic Association/International Geographical Union Commission on Toponymy; the Working Group on Geographical Names of the Interstate Council for Geodesy, Cartography, Cadastre and Earth Remote Sensing of the Commonwealth of Independent States; and the Pan American Institute of Geography and History.

46. Also at its 2nd meeting, the Group of Experts considered agenda item 5 and adopted the draft organization of work for the Eleventh Conference.

F. Documentation

47. The documents before the Group of Experts at its thirtieth session are available from the website of the Statistics Division.[2]

[2] http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/ungegnSession30.html.

Annex

List of geographical and linguistic divisions

Africa Central Division

Africa East Division

Africa South Division

Africa West Division

Arabic Division

Asia East Division (other than China)

Asia South-East Division

Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic)

Baltic Division

Celtic Division

China Division

Dutch- and German-speaking Division

East Central and South-East Europe Division

Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division

East Mediterranean Division (other than Arabic)

French-speaking Division

India Division

Latin America Division

Norden Division

Pacific South-West Division

Portuguese-speaking Division

Romano-Hellenic Division

United Kingdom Division

United States of America/Canada Division